

peasant husband has never taken conjugal rights. Orestes asks whether the husband has taken a vow of chastity, so that a vow of chastity was not an unknown thing. The notion of virginity was very foreign to the mores of the Greeks, but it existed amongst them. It gained ground in the later centuries. At the time of Christ it is certain that a wave of asceticism -was running through the Hellenistic world.¹ It may have been due to the sense of decline and loss in comparison with the earlier times. It seems to bear witness to a feeling that the world was on a wrong path, in spite of Roman glory and luxury. If they could not correct the course of things, they could at least renounce the luxury. That seemed like an effort to stem the tide. More commonly the sentiment was less defined and less morally vigorous. It was only world sickness. Cases occurred of individuals who renounced marriage, or lived in it without conjugal intimacy.² The Stoics, Cynics, Neopythagoreans, and Neoplatonists all had ascetic elements in their doctrines. The wandering preachers of these sects were rarely men of any earnest purpose, and their speeches were empty rhetorical exercises, but they popularized the doctrines of the sects. Simon Stylites only continued a pagan custom. There were in front of the temple at Hierapolis two columns one hundred and eighty feet high. Twice a year a man climbed one of these and remained on top of it for seven days to pray and commune with the gods, or in memory of Deukalion and the flood. He drew up supplies with a rope. People brought him gifts of money and he prayed for them, swinging a brazen instrument which made a screaming sound.³

682. Hebrew asceticism. The Jewish tradition

was that at Sinai all the people were ordered to refrain from women for the time, but that for Moses this injunction was unlimited (Exod. xix. 15). In the rabbinical period it was established doctrine that any one who desired to receive a revelation from God must refrain from women.⁴ Other cases in the Old Testament show that persons who were under a renunciation of this kind were in

¹ Mahaffy, *The Grecian World under* ² Lecky, *Eur. Morals*, II, 315.
Roman Sway 180. ⁸ Lucian, *Life of Syria Dea* sec. 28.

⁴ *Jewish Encyc.*, V, 226.